

**REMARKS/ARGUMENTS**

The Office Action mailed March 10, 2005 has been reviewed and carefully considered. Claims 1-7 are pending in this application, with claim 1 being the only independent claim. Reconsideration of the above-identified application in view of the following remarks is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-7 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 as unpatentable over U.S. 5,323,702 (Vrotacoe '702) in view of U.S. 6,105,498 (Vrotacoe '498).

Independent claim 1 recites a sleeve with a rubber covering having elastic layer elements, wherein "the elastic layer elements being uniform in the circumferential direction and prestrained to varying degrees as a function of axial position so that the sleeve has a tangential stiffness profile which varies in the axial direction and is symmetric with respect to the axial center of the sleeve".

The Examiner states in the Office Action in response to the previous arguments filed on December 9, 2004 that the prestraining is a process step. However, as indicated above, the claim recites that the elastic layer is prestrained. For example, if a rubber band is stretched to fit around a stack of paper, the rubber band is prestrained in the installed condition. The fact that the rubber band is prestrained in its installed condition is a structural limitation. For the same reasons, the claimed limitation of an elastic element prestrained to varying degrees as a function of axial position is a structural limitation which must be considered.

Neither Vrotacoe '702 nor Vrotacoe '498, alone or in combination teach or suggest that an elastic layer is prestrained by varying degrees along an axial length so that the sleeve has a tangential stiffness profile along the length of the sleeve that is symmetric with respect to the axial center of the sleeve. Vrotacoe '702 discloses a printing blanket comprising an inner carrier sleeve

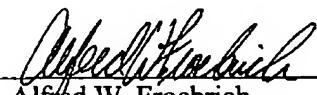
and a rubber covering having a layer with compressible elements 62 or 64, and a layer with elastic elements 80 or 94 which impart stiffness. As indicated in the Office Action, Vrotacoe '702 fails to disclose, teach or suggest a varying stiffness profile in the axial direction, or any measure for achieving such a profile.

Vrotacoe '498 recognizes the desirability of varying the stiffness and/or compressibility axially, but does not suggest elastic layer elements that are "prestrained to varying degrees as a function of axial position so that the sleeve has a tangential stiffness profile which varies in the axial direction and is symmetric with respect to the axial center of the sleeve". Vrotacoe '498 discloses at col. 5, lines 11-14, that a blanket may be stiffer at the ends than in the center but does not say how to achieve these results. Accordingly, Vrotacoe '498 fails to disclose that the elastic layer elements are "prestrained to varying degrees as a function of axial position so that the sleeve has a tangential stiffness profile which varies in the axial direction and is symmetric with respect to the axial center of the sleeve", as expressly recited in independent claim 1.

It is believed that no fees or charges are required at this time in connection with the present application. However, if any fees or charges are required at this time, they may be charged to our Patent and Trademark Office Deposit Account No. 03-2412.

Respectfully submitted,  
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